Baby Steps

Created by Katsuki Hikaru

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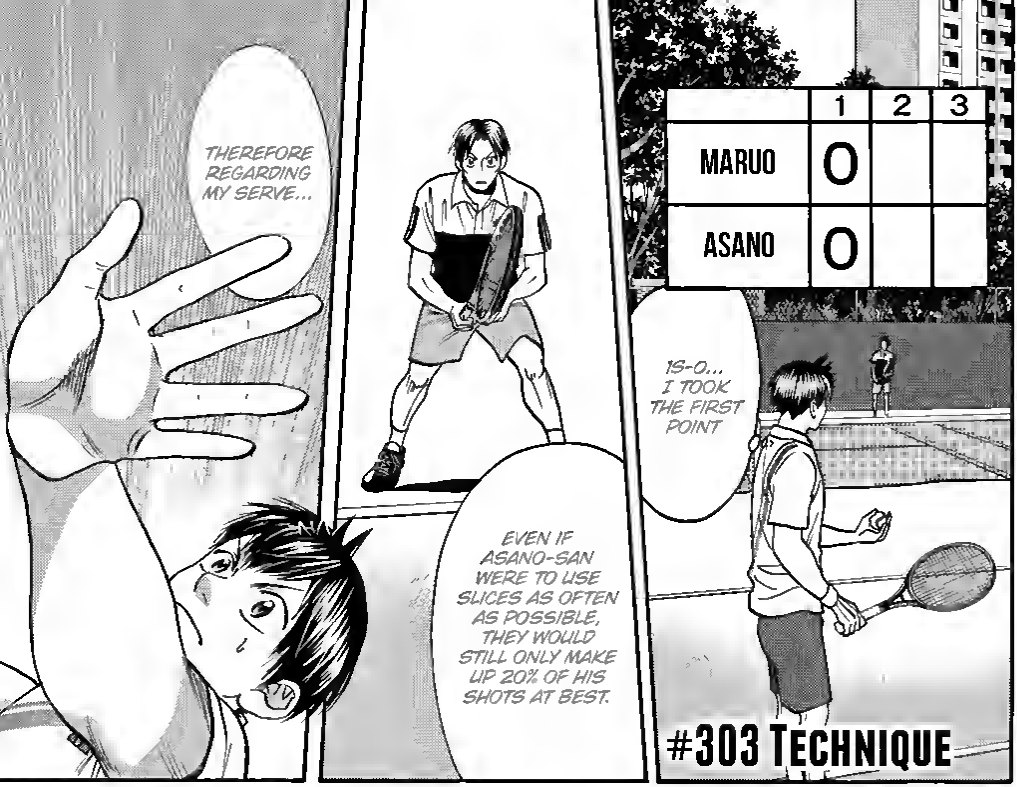
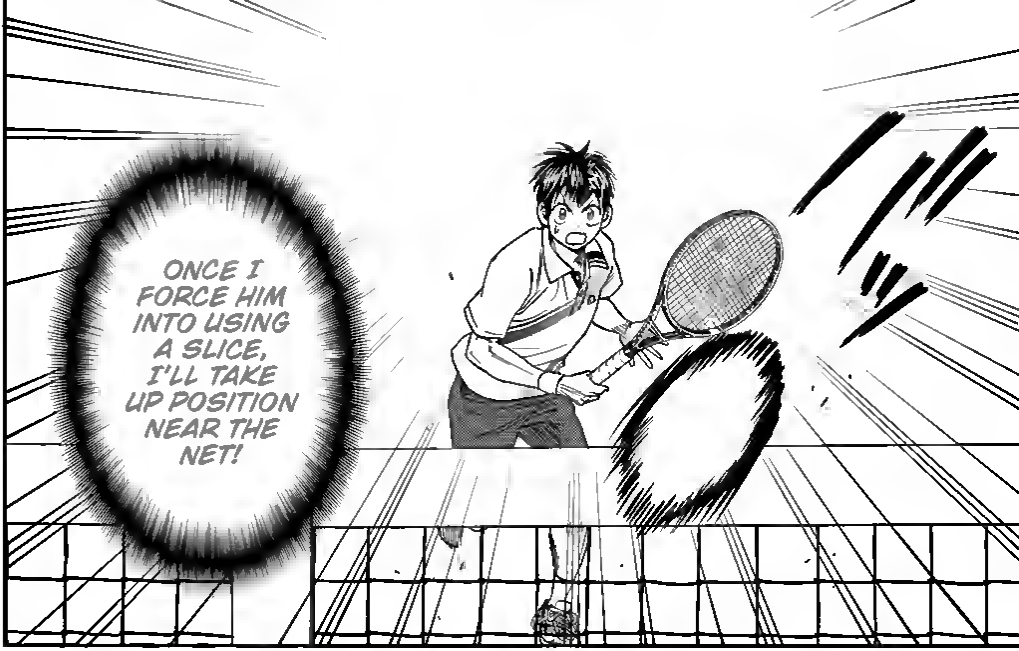
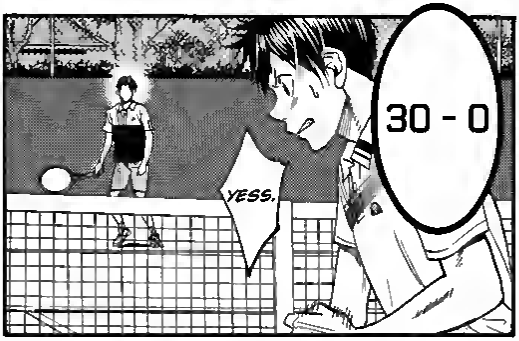
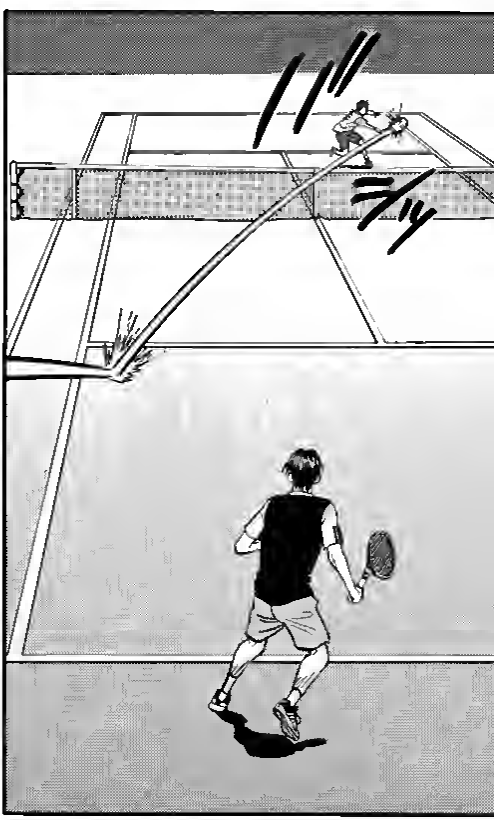
PLEASE CONSIDER BUYING THIS MANGA TO SUPPORT THE AUTHOR WHEN IT IS AVAILABLE IN YOUR COUNTRY


THEREFORE REGARDING MY SERVE...
EVEN IF ASANO-SAN WERE TO USE SLICES AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE, THEY WOULD STILL ONLY MAKE UP 20% OF HIS SHOTS AT BEST.
1 2 3
MARUO O
ASANO O
IS-O... I TOOK THE FIRST POINT
#303 TECHNIQUE

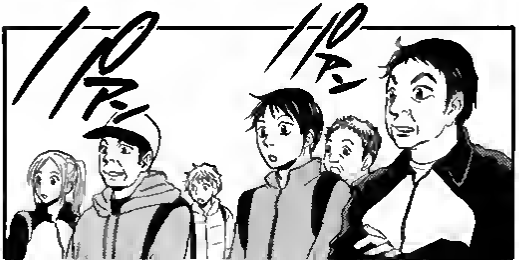
HE'S GOT SOME GOOD CONTROL!
!
IF I CAN MAKE HIM RUN BY PUTTING EMPHASIS ON MY COURSES.
THE CHANCES HE'LL USE A SLICE WILL INCREASE.


ONCE I FORCE HIM INTO USING A SLICE, I'LL TAKE UP POSITION NEAR THE NET!

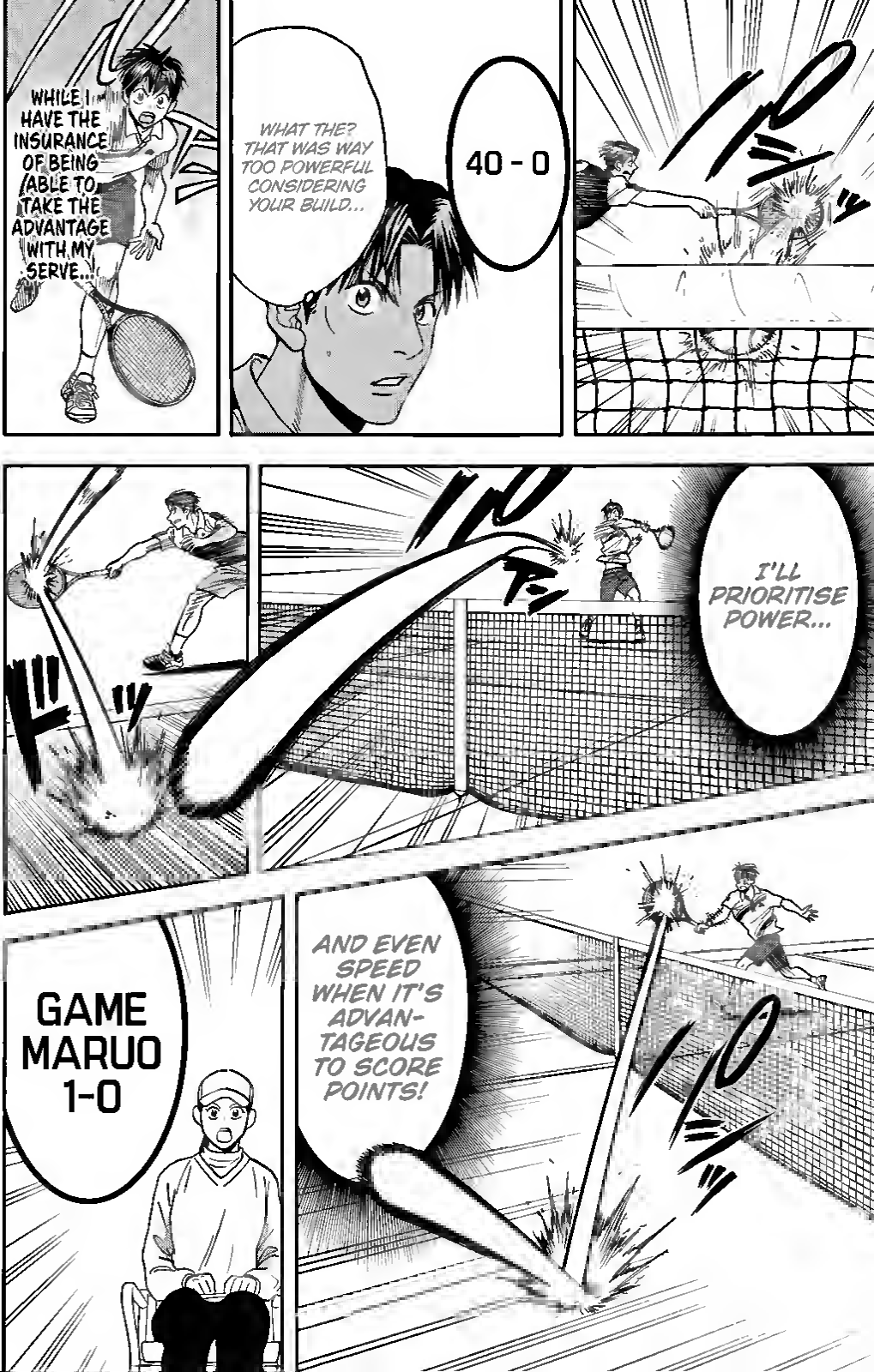

30 - 0
YESS.



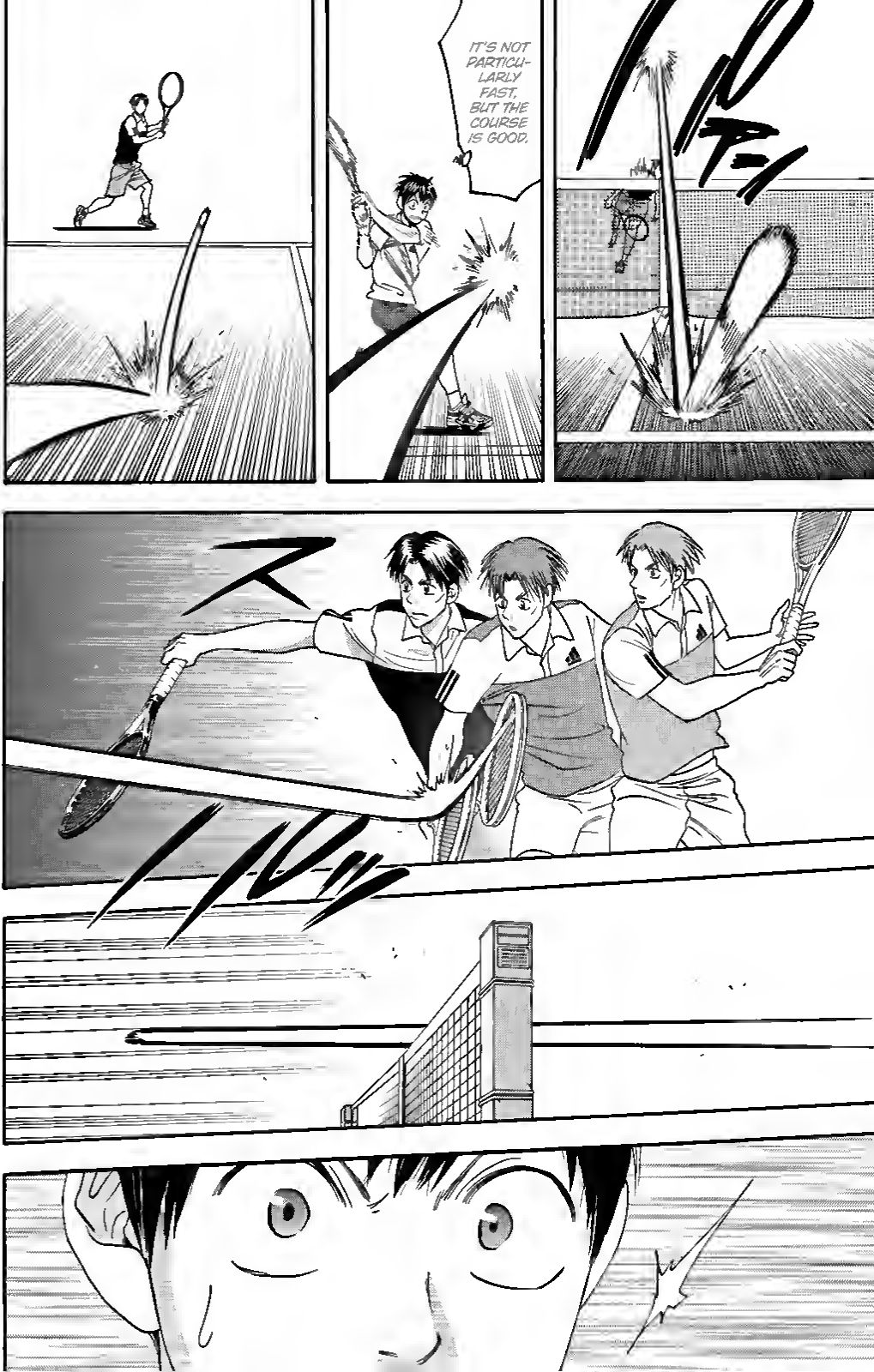
HE KEEPS MOVING UP TO THE NET. IS HE DOING THAT AS A COUNTERMEASURE AGAINST MY SLICE?



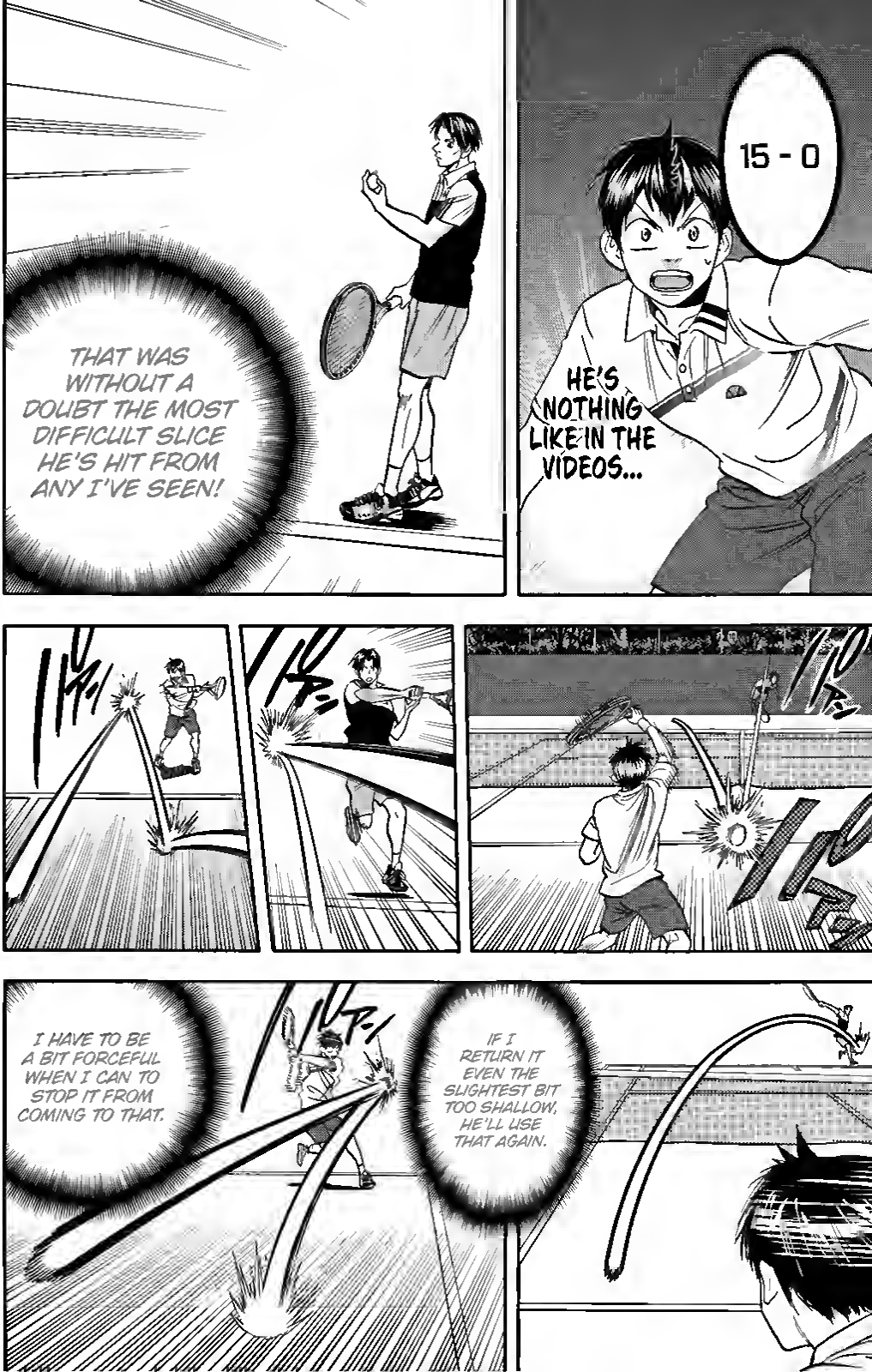
TODAY I ACTUALLY HAVE AN OPPONENT I CAN COUNTER USING POWER AND SPEED FOR ONCE.
SO FROM TIME TO TIME I'LL STAKE IT ALL ON POWER!
EVEN WHILE USING MY CHANGE OF PACE, I'LL HAVE TO MAKE EFFECTIVE USE OF POWER SHOTS IN PARTICULAR.


WHILE I HAVE THE INSURANCE OF BEING ABLE TO TAKE THE ADVANTAGE WITH MY SERVE...
WHAT THE? THAT WAS WAY TOO POWERFUL CONSIDERING YOUR BUILD...
40 - 0
I'LL PRIORITISE POWER...
AND EVEN SPEED WHEN IT'S ADVAN-TAGEOUS TO SCORE POINTS!
GAME MARUO 1-0

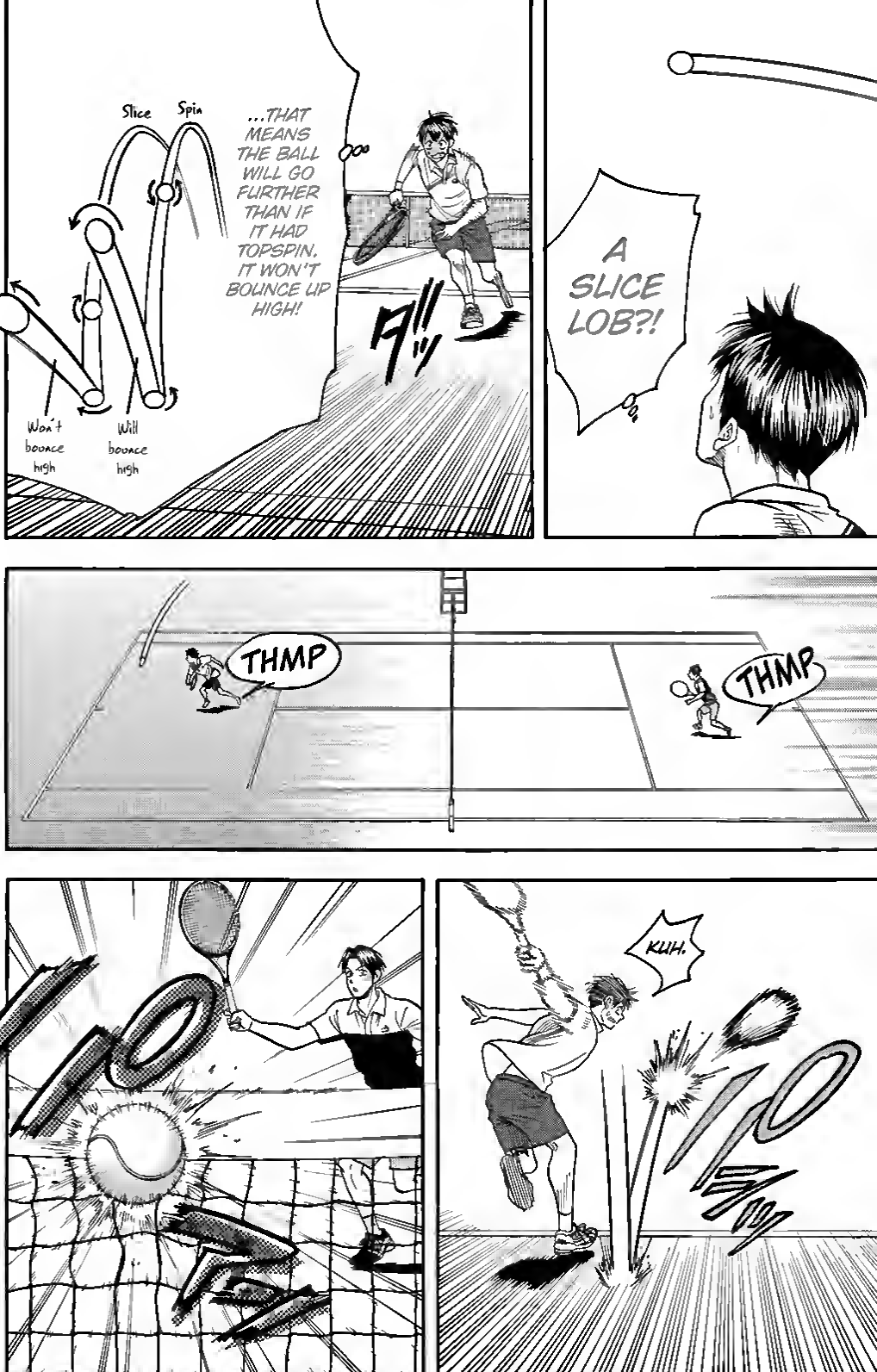
WITH HIS TECHNIQUE, ASANO-SAN IS GOOD AT COMING UP WITH STRATEGIES.
EXTENDED RALLIES ARE WHERE HE REALLY SHINES.
YEAH! THIS IS GOING WELL!
I SHOULD STOP THE RALLIES FROM BECOMING TOO LONG TO PRESERVE MY MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STAMINA.
THEN ALL I'LL HAVE TO THINK ABOUT IS HOW TO BREAK AND WHAT KINDS OF RISKS TO TAKE.
ACCORDING TO MY DATA, IF I CAN CONSISTENTLY KEEP MY SERVE IN THE EARLY MOMENTS OF THE MATCH WITH SHORT RALLIES...


IT'S NOT PARTICU-LARLY FAST, BUT THE COURSE IS GOOD.

WHAT SPEED! AFTER BOUNCING, IT'S SO LOW THAT IT'S ALMOST AS IF IT'S CREEPING ALONG THE GROUND...
OH DAMN, HE'S COME FORWARD!

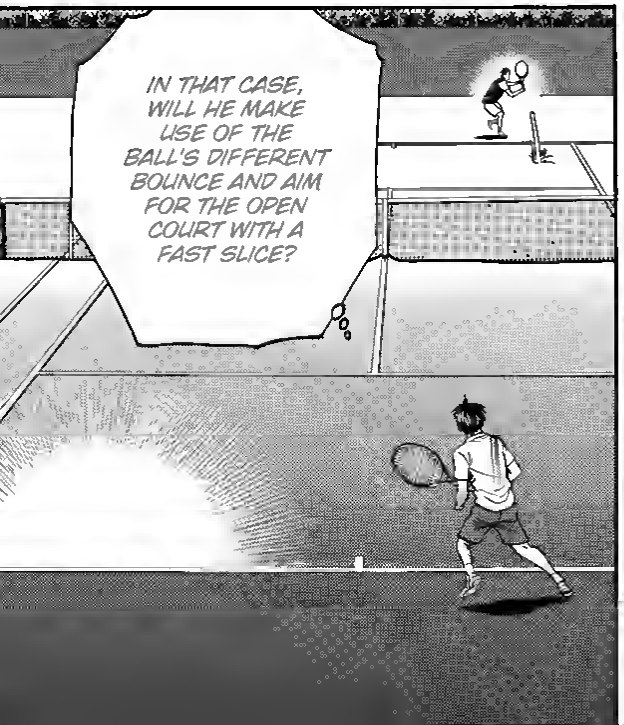

THAT WAS WITHOUT A DOUBT THE MOST DIFFICULT SLICE HE'S HIT FROM ANY I'VE SEEN!
15 - 0
HE'S NOTHING LIKE IN THE VIDEOS...
I HAVE TO BE A BIT FORCEFUL WHEN I CAN TO STOP IT FROM COMING TO THAT.
IF I RETURN IT EVEN THE SLIGHTEST BIT TOO SHALLOW, HE'LL USE THAT AGAIN.

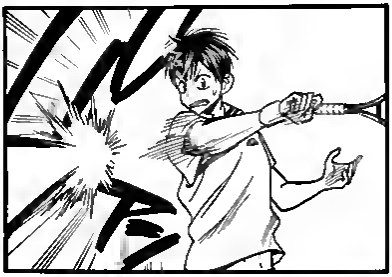
HE'S REARING UP FOR A SLICE... I'M READY FOR IT!
I SHOULD MOVE UP TO CUT THIS POINT SHORT...
ON THE CONTRARY, NOW THAT I'M THIS FAR FORWARD, THAT SLICE WILL END UP CREATING A CHANCE FOR ME.
!?


Slice
Spin
Won't bounce high
Will bounce high
...THAT MEANS THE BALL WILL GO FURTHER THAN IF IT HAD TOPSPIN. IT WON'T BOUNCE UP HIGH!
A SLICE LOB?!
THMP
THMP
KUH.

ぎゅん

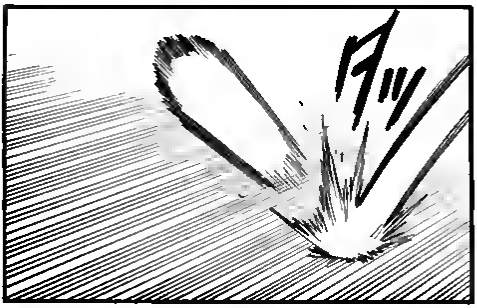
30 - 0
TCH.
I HAVEN'T HAD MUCH EXPERIENCE WITH BALLS LIKE THAT BEFORE.
DAMMIT. A SLOW AND OFFENSIVE LOB...


IN THAT CASE, WILL HE MAKE USE OF THE BALL'S DIFFERENT BOUNCE AND AIM FOR THE OPEN COURT WITH A FAST SLICE?



THIS TIME HE WENT WITH STRONG SPIN. IS THIS WHAT YUKICHI-KUN WAS REFERRING TO?

NO, IT'S A SLICE TO THE CENTER.

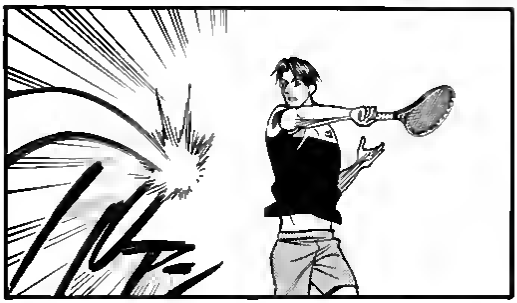


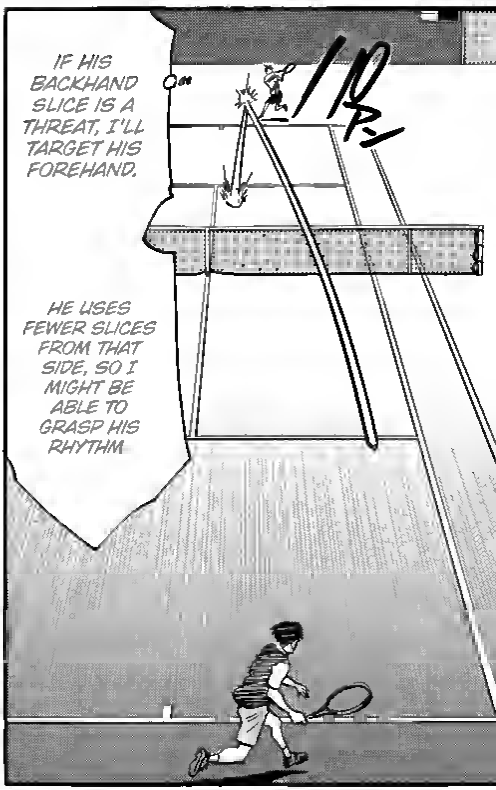
IT WILL SKIP FORWARD THOUGH, SO I SHOULD TAKE CARE TO—

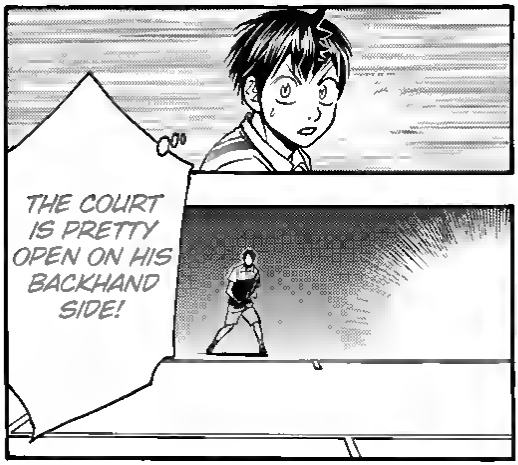
HUH, IT'S NOT SKIPPING?!

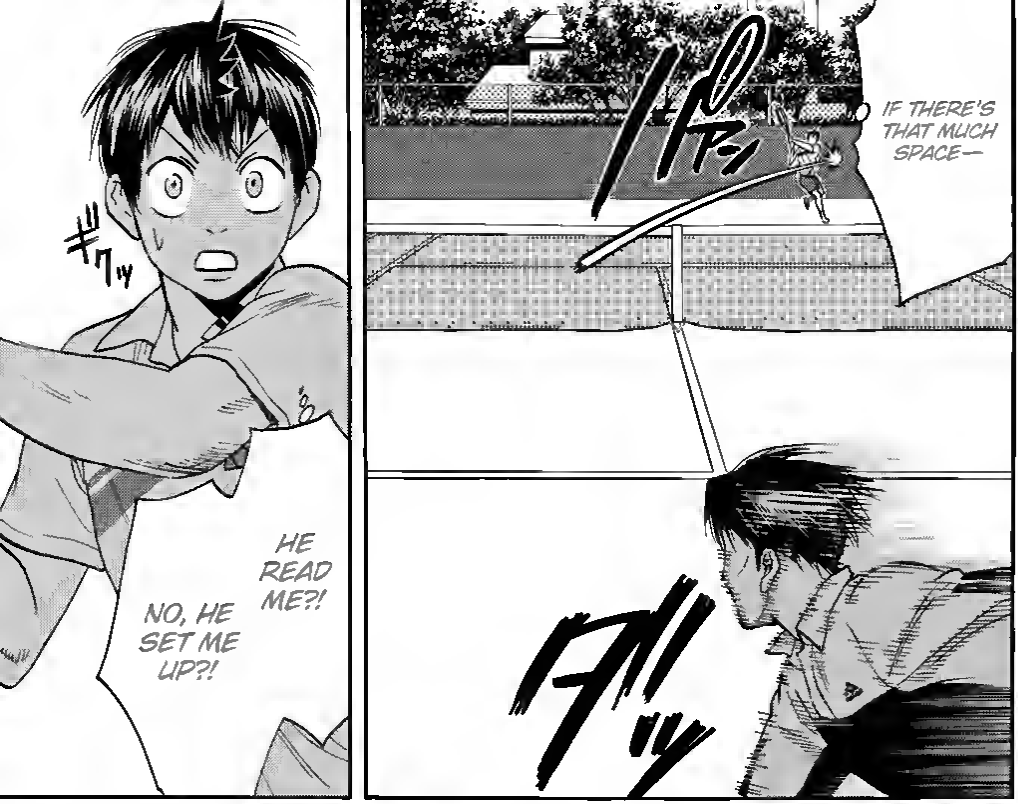
Slice lob
Fast slice
Regular slice
ON TOP OF THAT, HE'S HITTING BALLS YOU'D NEVER EXPECT TO LOCATIONS YOU'D NEVER EXPECT WHEN YOU'D NEVER EXPECT THEM...
HANG ON, WITH THE LOB INCLUDED, THAT MEANS HE'S HIT THREE DIFFERENT SLICES ALL WITH THE SAME FORM.
KUH.
40 – 0
WHAT? WAS THAT JUST A REGULAR SLICE THEN?!
THIS IS THE TECHNIQUE OF A PLAYER WHO RANKED AMONG THE TOP IN THE COUNTRY UNTIL JUST A FEW YEARS AGO.
NO. IT'S MORE THAN JUST A DIFFERENCE IN TECHNIQUE. I CAN FEEL AN ENORMOUS GAP IN EXPERIENCE.

BUT I NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD BE EASY TO BREAK HIS SERVE TO BEGIN WITH.

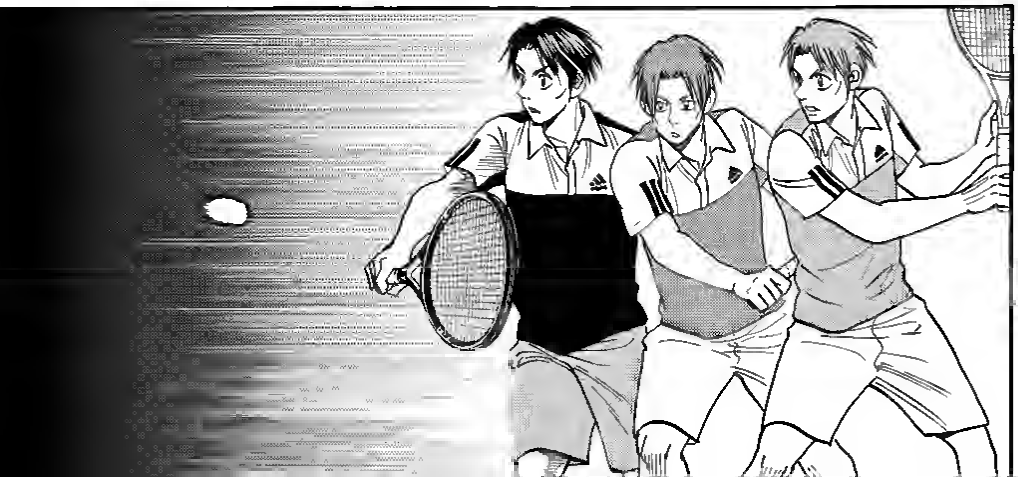



IF HIS BACKHAND SLICE IS A THREAT, I'LL TARGET HIS FOREHAND.
HE USES FEWER SLICES FROM THAT SIDE, SO I MIGHT BE ABLE TO GRASP HIS RHYTHM.


THE COURT IS PRETTY OPEN ON HIS BACKHAND SIDE!

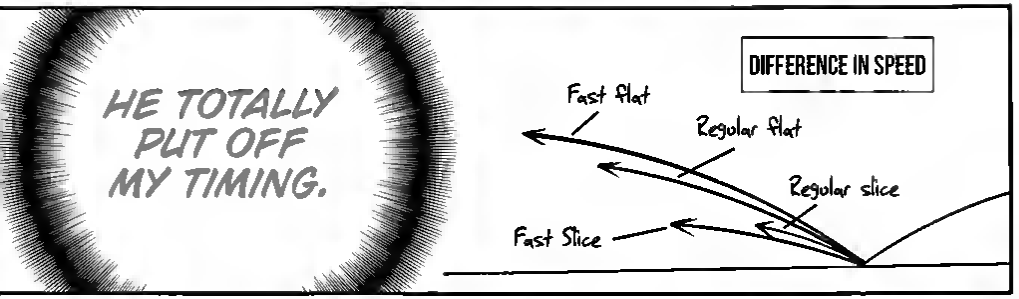

IF THERE'S THAT MUCH SPACE—
HE READ ME?!
NO, HE SET ME UP?!

AT THEIR CORE, SLICES AREN'T DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH, SO IF I LOOK CLOSELY I SHOULD BE ABLE TO WORK IT OUT.
DON'T PANIC.
IS HE GOING TO USE A SLICE?



A F-FLAT?

I WAS WAITING FOR A SLOW SLICE, SO HE COMPLETELY ACED ME EVEN THOUGH IT WAS A REGULAR FLAT...
WHOA, THAT WAS NICE.
GOOD ONE, ASANO-SAN!
GAME ASANO 1—1


HE TOTALLY PUT OFF MY TIMING.
DIFFERENCE IN SPEED
Fast flat
Regular flat
Regular slice
Fast Slice

THERE WE GO. IT'S NICE THAT YOU'RE SO STRAIGHT-FORWARD, MARUO-KUN.